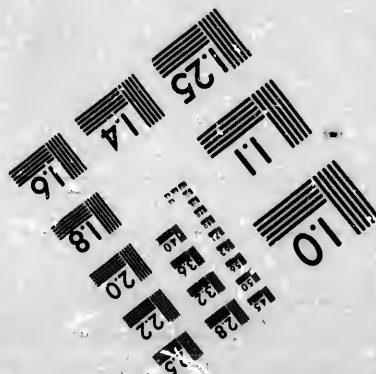
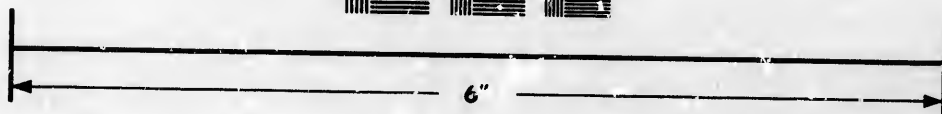
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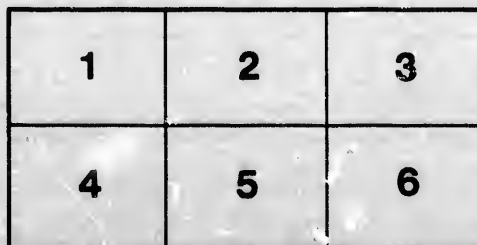
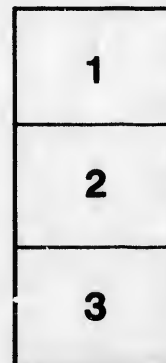
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Journalism.

AN ADDRESS

DELIVERED BEFORE THE

POLITICAL SCIENCE CLUB

—OF—

TORONTO UNIVERSITY,

—BY—

J. S. WILLISON,

EDITOR OF THE GLOBE,

—ON—

NOVEMBER 23, 1899.

1899

(6)

75375

Journalism.



IN THE EFFICIENCY of its news service and the perfection of its mechanical equipment the press of Canada ranks with any press in the world. Perhaps few Canadians realize what an enormous field the chief Canadian papers cover, how heavy are the expenditures which rest particularly upon the morning journals, and how small and far-scattered is the population upon which they lean for support. We have in Canada a population of between five and six millions of people. At least one and a half millions of these are French, and furnish few subscribers to the journals that are printed in English. We are separated by vast distances from the eastern as well as from the western Provinces. We have to carry our despatches from the far Yukon goldfields, from the mining camps of British Columbia, from the cities on the Pacific and from the cities on the Atlantic—from all over a territory almost as vast as that of the United States, but with few great centres of population, and, therefore, with no hope that we can achieve the large circulations and earn the great

revenues that are secured by the chief metropolitan journals of the old world, or even of the more populous communities in the American Republic. We receive as much news by cable as the American journals, and we give more space than even the best of the British papers to events in the United States. If we profit somewhat through our connection with the American press agencies, we still enlarge our papers to find space for all this world news and meet the costs of editing, composition and distribution. Then the news tolls within our home field are heavy, for as distances are great and population sparse, charges for services by wire are necessarily high, and we have also to maintain correspondents at important centres. To all this there is one other onerous burden to be added. While Ottawa has an excellent and enterprising local press, the population is much below that of Montreal or Toronto, and naturally, therefore, the chief newspapers of the country are not published at the Federal capital. We follow the British rather than the American system in our method of Parliamentary reporting, and hence the morning journals, and particularly those of Toronto, are under heavy expenditures during each session of Parliament. Some of these papers maintain a staff of four men at the capital during most of the time that Parliament is sitting, and for four or five months of each year send over the wires daily from 5,000 to 10,000 words of the proceedings of Parliament. On the delivery of an important budget statement, or in case of some other great debate of exceptional

popular interest, there have come over the wires to each of the morning papers of Toronto as many as twenty thousand, or even thirty thousand, words of one day's debate in the House of Commons. Again, we follow closely on British lines in our system of reporting the speeches of political leaders when campaigning throughout the country; and here also charges that bulk high in a twelvemonth have to be met for telegraph tolls and for travelling representatives of the various papers. Distances are so great and trains so few, 'comparatively, that we have to send a much greater proportion of our despatches by wire than is the case even in England, where probably the great dailies of Manchester and Birmingham are able to use the mails for the bulk of their London reports. In view of all these facts it may fairly be said that the newspapers of Canada are discharging their important functions with exceptional enterprise and admirable public spirit, and we may safely conclude that it is not in journalism that the millionaires of Canada are made, and that it is not by journalists that the income tax is evaded. So far as I can learn, however, the salaries of Canadian journalists, when we consider the sparseness of our population and the very onerous conditions under which newspapers are published in this country, are fair, while the wages paid in the mechanical departments compare very favorably with the wages paid in any other Canadian industry. There are no great financial places in the profession, as in banking or in

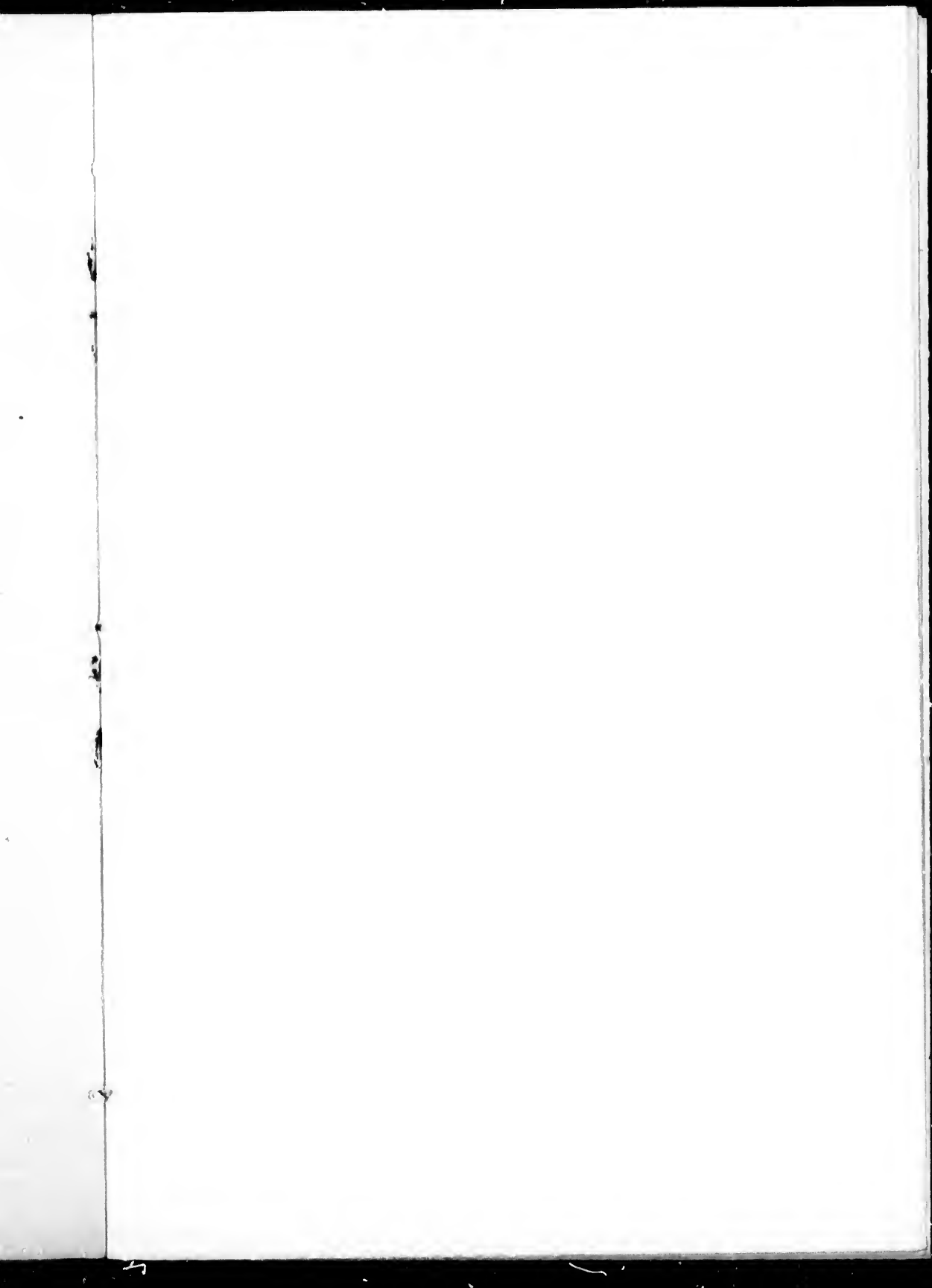
the head offices of the great railway corporations, but there are at least a few places where the salaries reach into the thousands, and generally the scale of remuneration tends upward, as there is a growing demand for men better equipped with the learning of the schools and better fitted for grappling with the world-problems that press for consideration and for solution, here as in all other free communities.

The useful qualifications for success in journalism are a steady courage, a sober common sense, hard study of social and economic conditions, a thorough grasp of the political issues of the time, particularly in one's own country, and a mastery of simple, easy, familiar English. The pioneer conditions under which so many of the active journalists of the country came from the printer's case are passing. Here, as elsewhere, the inexorable machine is developing a class of mechanical experts and altering the old relation between the mechanical and editorial departments. Then, social and material conditions grow always more complex, and the demand for specialists in journalism, as in all other modern enterprises, more imperative. We must look more and more to the universities, to the departments of English and the departments of political science, for the finished writers and trained thinkers who shall make the journalism of Canada a creditable literary product, and a sane, well-balanced, progressive force in public affairs. Nowhere can it be more true than in journalism that knowledge is power, and if the journalists of America

had dipped deeper into history, into the science of practical economics, into the financial heresies of revolutionary France, into the strange and impotent social experiments of the second French Republic, into the restrictive social and economic legislation of early England, they would have a less profound faith in the omnipotence of Legislatures to give value to coin or direction to commerce, to determine the wages of labor or the profits of industry, to give divinity to human nature or create a Paradise by statute. One hears the fear expressed that the corporations and the capitalists are acquiring an undue control over the universities of the United States; but however that may be, it is still true that the best economic work and the soundest economic thinking in that country are proceeding from the universities; that out of these universities come many voices that speak and fear not; that out of these universities comes much of the best reasoned and most powerful advocacy of the control or regulation of public franchises, and for reform of the conditions which breed monopoly and plutocracy, and much of the best resistance to social and economic fallacies that have cheated and betrayed in other times, and yet seem new and praiseworthy to a class of newspapers which have faith only in the omnipotence of their own conclusions, and to a class of politicians who seem to believe that a plurality in the ward can overturn the decrees of Divine Providence. The universities of the United States are producing a body of social and economic literature that must be very

influential in determining courses of public policy, and the more students trained under these sound and progressive economic thinkers we can get into journalism the better for the press and the better for the people.

There is a growing opinion that the press ought to be in very responsible hands, and perhaps a disposition to exaggerate its faults and follies, and undervalue its inestimable work for the moral and material welfare of mankind. We have got far away from the old notion that there was a touch of infallibility in the utterances of a public journal ; but we must recognize that it is still possible for a sensational press in times of unrest, when the public temper is eager and the popular mind distressed and disturbed, to raise the furies in a community and effect grave national and international mischiefs. The press is powerful to build and create, but, perhaps, not less powerful to pull down and destroy. Hence there is under conditions of settled opinion an increasing demand that the press shall show capacity for self-discipline, that it shall exhibit something like the self-restraint of a prudent and responsible statesmanship, and shall deal wisely and warily with questions that threaten a country's domestic peace or imperil its international relationships. Nowhere is the press more mischievous than in the realm of international affairs. In no other field is the press more powerful. It is the servant of intriguing diplomats, the mouthpiece of ambitious Ministers ; it lashes popular opinion into fury, it forces free Parlia-



ments to bow to the opinion it has created. It is the screaming devil of France. Vulgar, scurrilous, venomous and ugly, it has no regard for private character, no respect for high office, no sense of public responsibility, no appreciation of the delicacy of international relationships. Bodley quotes from one of the best of the French journals the statement that electoral literature under the Third Republic is "abject." He declares that there "a political opponent is not, as in countries where the Parliamentary system is a tradition, a fellow-creature to be treated with respect and even cordiality in the intervals of party battles, but a dangerous monster to be exterminated." He puts among the reasons which keep capable men out of the Legislature in France, quoting high authority for his statement, "the abject character of electioneering literature, in which a candidate finds every intimate detail of his private life lampooned, and so has to retaliate with like poisoned weapons; the unedifying coarseness of journalistic polemics, which is not attenuated even in the rare cases where a candidate is an Academician." We do better than this in Canada; but here, too, we have our share of bitterness, of violence, of unnecessary personal attack, and of deliberate misrepresentation of men's words and motives in order to serve the ends of party or the business interests of rival newspapers.

Anglo-Saxons everywhere rejoice to-day over the extraordinary growth of good feeling between Great Britain and the United States. No other international

development of our time promises so much for the peace of the world, and for all the good ends of humanity and civilization. It is to the honor of the press of Great Britain that this great reconciliation was nobly and splendidly promoted by its foremost writers, as well as by the statesmen at Westminster. We cannot say as much for the press of this continent, neither on this side of the border nor on the other. There is more of the spirit of statesmanship, more of moderation, more of restraint, more of that sober calm and steadfast courage which become men who labor with world-wide issues and carry world-wide responsibilities in the press of Great Britain than in any other press in the world. Even there, however, if Lord Salisbury were less the steady, stalwart and staunchly immovable figure that he is, Great Britain would have been hurried into a premature war with Russia. He was forced to stand "four square to all the winds that blew," even against the press of his own party, in order to save the world's peace and avert a tragedy that would have brought this splendid century to its close in blood and ruin. Bismarck used a subservient press to make mischief all over Europe, to further the secret aims of an insidious statecraft, and to promote at any cost his imperial designs for the creation, the unification and the consolidation of the German Empire. Most of us believe that final good will come out of the destruction of Spanish power in Cuba and in the Philippines, that in those islands freedom and progress will take the place of servitude

and reaction, and that, next to the British Empire, the free Republic of the United States is, to use Lord Rosebery's term, the secular agency in the world best worth preserving. But there have been more admirable things than the spirit in which a great part of the press of the United States drove the republic on to that war, and we may feel sure that the story of American rule in the new possessions of the republic will read better to future generations of Americans than the story of the methods by and the conditions under which those possessions were acquired. One wonders why such sober-minded statesmen as Mr. James Bryce and such brilliant journalists as Mr. Massingham of *The London Chronicle*, who gave their hearty assent to the war against Spain, should express such stern doubt as to the necessity for the war in South Africa. If in the first case they could give the benefit of the doubt to the United States, surely in the second they can give the benefit of the doubt to Great Britain. In the calm judgment of the historian very few of the wars even of the last half century were either just or necessary. But in all of these wars the press drove on the nations to the combat, and necessarily was the eager ally of the combatants. For this last attitude one should perhaps be slow to censure. When war is on, the patriot holds up his flag and gives his heart and his prayer to the armies of his country. But except when the very honor of a nation is at stake, it is a poor thing to make the patriotism of men an instrument for insult

and aggression, and the press could do very much more than it is doing to exalt the days and the ways of peace, to soften international jealousies, to keep in check the ambitions of rulers and the passions of democracies, and bring nearer the parliament of man and the federation of the world.

In political controversy there will always be temper and vigor ; but vigor need not degenerate into virulence, and hard blows, so long as they are not delivered below the belt, give spirit to public debate and vitality to free institutions. One must have a stout heart if he would go into politics. But, after all, there is a spirit of fair play in Anglo-Saxon peoples, and a point at which malicious and unworthy pursuit of a public man turns to his advantage and brings chivalrous souls to his side. Except in seasons of unusual popular passion the people are quick to know where fair and legitimate criticism ends and vindictive pursuit begins, and once that point is reached the blows of the assailant fall harmless and the cause of the victim is promoted. In politics as in the prize ring the rules of the game must be observed, foul play wins no permanent advantage, and misrepresentation and falsehood gain no enduring success. The press of Canada conducts political debate upon perhaps a higher level than that of the United States, but we still fall distinctly below the standard which prevails in Great Britain. It is probably true that we often make a tremendous clamor over small issues, and often deal with large issues in a small way. Too often, it may be, we

are more ready to misrepresent an opponent than to meet his argument, more ready to appeal to the meaner prejudices than to the higher sentiment of the community, more ready to run at the heels of popular clamor than to stand steadfast for the principles and policies which one's inner conviction and sober judgment approve. It seems to me that we in Canada sometimes forget that free speech is the inalienable birthright of the British citizen, and that the great pioneers of British freedom were men who would not conform to the temper and conditions of the times in which they lived, and that we demand an absolute submission to every passing wave of passion and every outbreak of popular prejudice. This is a servitude to which none of us can afford to submit. There could be no greater treason to free institutions and the moral progress of the world. The qualities of courage and public spirit are none too common, and a sincere view, come from what source it may, has a right to be uttered. There are far too many forces making for repression in these days. The organization of party keeps many voices in check. But this to me is a minor evil. There is an independence within the party organizations which largely influences party policy and makes an enduring political dictatorship impossible in a free country. Besides, it seems to me that no other system of popular government equal to the party system, with all its abuses, has been devised. Under this system the will of the people substantially prevails, and the radical and progressive elements of the community

have probably a more influential voice than even under the rule of the initiative and referendum. In many cases it is easier to move the politician seeking for electoral support than the great inert masses of the people, and very often the independent remnant exerts an undue political influence. In fact, some sound thinkers hold that one of the evils of modern democratic government lies in the competition of rival politicians and rival parties for the support of organized votes and aggressive minorities. There is a measure of justice in the criticism, and probably progress in some directions would be slower if the politicians, instead of making secret bargains with these active and aggressive groups, were forced to meet the whole people upon the particular question at issue, and if all advance were blocked until the faith of a few enthusiasts became the conviction of a majority of the people.

But more ominous and more dangerous is the growing power of corporations and the influence of great aggregations of capital in few hands, which is the most sinister development in modern industrial conditions. Here is a danger to the press and a real peril to popular government, for the press can have no mission in the world worth filling except as the articulate voice of the plain, unorganized and unsubsidized people. Notwithstanding all that may be said, we have as yet no reason to conclude that the corporations have a dominating voice in the press or in the public life of Canada. It is, perhaps, doubtful if they can

ever win any enduring victory in a free country. The very suspicion that is bred by the lobby of the corporation in Parliament may, perhaps, lead to a condition of the public mind under which the corporation may get less than justice, and capital become an object of unjust suspicion and a subject for unrighteous dealing. At least this is true, that no public journal can be influential as the mere mouthpiece of a corporation, and perhaps we could have no better evidence of this than the efforts of party papers upon the one side or the other to convict public men and public journals of compromising relations with corporations which do not exist in fact. In Canada the people are still supreme, and their free suffrage is the best franchise of newspapers and the best refuge for Governments.

It is a fault, or at least a habit, of the press that it very often seeks to drive Governments far in advance of public opinion. This cannot be done with safety to Governments or with advantage to the commonwealth. All useful and effective legislation must rest upon a great body of popular support. The press is necessarily and legitimately an agitator, very often a voice crying in the wilderness; always, if it performs its true functions, seeking to better social and material conditions. All wise and provident government waits to some extent upon public opinion, and crystallizes into legislation the settled judgment of a majority of the people. The true function of the legislator, as contrasted with that of the journalist, is nowhere better stated than in the course of Lecky's estimate of

JOURNALISM.

Walpole. He says :—" He belonged to that class of legislators who recognize fully that government is an organic thing, that all transitions, to be safe, should be the gradual product of public opinion, that the great end of statesmanship is to secure the nation's practical well-being and allow its social and industrial forces to develop unimpeded, and that a wise Minister will carefully avoid exciting violent passions, provoking reactions, offending large classes and generating enduring discontents." It is the business of the journalist to develop public opinion, to liberalize and energize the social and industrial forces, to utter the voice of the people, and go on his way stoutly, stumbling often as he will, rash often as he may be, but always in the serene confidence that good will come out of free discussion, that "the common sense of most" will hold even "a fretful realm in awe," and that, as Whittier says :—

"The outworn rite, the old abuse,
The pious fraud, transparent grown,
The good held captive in the use
Of wrong alone—

"These wait their doom from that great law
Which makes the past time serve to-day,
And fresher life the world shall draw
From their decay."



